

REPORT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The Wakefield HHS Department is part of a regional agreement shared with the City of Melrose and the Town of Stoneham. The department consists of shared staff positions and collaborative programming. The Wakefield Board of Health, consisting of three members, meets monthly and as needed. Their role is to set policy, adopt regulations, and enforce local/state laws.

In 2023, the Wakefield HHS Department focused on increasing access to mental health and behavioral health services, equitable access to vaccines, programming for substance use prevention, and building capacity in environmental health protection. Food safety-related education, mental health needs, and tobacco use prevention were identified as priority areas to be addressed. Other Town departments, community partners, and volunteers contributed greatly to the services the HHS department was able to provide.

Public Health Nursing:

The Regional Senior Public Health Nurse and Wakefield Public Health Nurse provided four core functions for the community: Emergency Sheltering Response, Health Promotion and Camps, Vaccinations, and Communicable Disease Monitoring.

- **Emergency Sheltering Response**

As part of a multi-disciplinary team, the Public Health Nurses worked with ten migrant families (32 adults and children) for two weeks, assessing healthcare needs, delivering food, and necessities, and providing support with the help of a Haitian-Creole interpreter.

- **Health Promotion and Camps**

The Public Health Nurses conduct weekly blood pressure and wellness clinics at the McCarthy Senior Center. They disseminate pertinent health information to the community during various events such as Town Day, Farmer's Market, and Festival by the Lake. Additionally, they engage in advocacy campaigns to promote awareness about health issues like colorectal cancer, skin cancer, heart health, and tick-borne diseases. Furthermore, the Public Health Nurses regularly meet with local summer camps on a weekly or biweekly basis from June to early August. During these sessions, they address matters such as childhood vaccinations, emergency medication authorizations, EpiPen training, camper-to-student ratios, facilities for sick children, and health concerns such as sunscreen application, hydration, and prevention of insect/bee stings and tick bites for over 800 campers.

- **Vaccinations**

In the past year, the Public Health Nurses provided planning and staffing, supply management, and safe transportation for 31 flu clinics, including both public and visits for individuals who are homebound. They were able to provide 1321 Flu vaccines. Dedicated in-office drop-in clinics continued to demonstrate great success, allowing Town employees and the public to have greater access to vaccinations. They also renewed Controlled Substance Use Registration and managed sharps disposal.

- Communicable Disease

The Public Health Nurses provided investigation and follow-up services for several State-reportable communicable diseases, including but not limited to Babesiosis, Norovirus, Campylobacteriosis, Giardiasis, Strep A, Strep B, H. Influenza, Hep C, Legionellosis, Salmonellosis, Strep pneumonia, Yersiniosis.

Environmental Health

Our Health Inspectors and administrative staff provide two core functions for the community: Food safety and housing/environmental health.

- Food Safety

The Town of Wakefield currently has 125 food permits issued to establishments ranging from schools and nursing homes to restaurants and supermarkets. Food establishments are ranked on a four-level scale of lowest to highest public health risk of food-borne illness (1-4). Establishments such as convenience stores with mostly pre-packaged food would require one annual inspection, whereas restaurants serving an expanded menu may require three annual inspections. Supermarkets, nursing homes, and establishments serving individuals at higher risk of severe consequences due to food-borne illnesses require a minimum of 4 annual inspections.

Types of Food Permits	# of Permits Issued	Revenue
Standard Food Permits	112	\$20,390
Temporary Events	53	\$1,125
Farmer's Market Permits	46	\$1,450
Mobile Food Permits	5	\$750
Ice Cream Vendors	4	\$600
Food Establishment Plan Reviews	7	\$650
--	227	\$24,965

Based on the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Risk-Based Inspection Schedule, we are required to complete a minimum of 290 routine inspections. When issues arise during an inspection, the Health Inspector will provide education and resources to the establishment to facilitate improvement in meeting the requirements of 105 CMR 590.00: State sanitary code Chapter X: Minimum sanitation standards for food establishments. Health Inspectors provide re-inspections as needed, depending on the quantity and/or severity of the violations. Education and guidance are the preferred methods of achieving compliance; the Board of Health aids in communicating with establishments when there are concerns. In some instances, when compliance is not achieved after multiple attempts, Health Inspectors may recommend temporary permit suspensions until a plan is put into place that will sufficiently address all concerns. In these cases, establishments are required to hire a Massachusetts Department of Public Health-approved food safety consultant for a designated period to help with more intensive training.

Health Inspectors perform plan reviews for new food establishments and pre-operational inspections. Plan reviews include menus, equipment, required certifications, policies, and procedures. This year, we have had 7 pre-operational inspections, reflecting an increase in businesses opening in the Town of Wakefield.

Housing/Environmental Health

Health Inspectors investigated over 155 complaints; housing comprises roughly 40%, while trash and rodents each comprise roughly 10% each. Health Inspectors are tasked with enforcing the Massachusetts State Sanitary Code, 105 CMR 410.00: Minimum standards of fitness for human habitation, Chapter II. The percentage of housing complaints from buildings with 10 or more units increased to 72% this year, coinciding with an increase in multi-unit dwellings and an increased need for services. 21% of the complaints required a higher level of involvement, including cases of hoarding and fires.

Our administrative staff and Health Inspectors issued a total of 676 permits which include permits for: animals, pools, camps, tobacco, funeral, tanning, dumpsters, body art, bodywork, transporters, permanent food, temporary food, mobile food, ice cream vendors, lodgings, septic, wells, and Farmer's Markets. We collected a total of \$72,475 in revenue.

Wakefield, Melrose, Malden, Medford, Stoneham, & Winchester participate in the Public Health Excellence Shared Services Grant (\$561,000 annually). The environmental health-focused grant provides funding for food and housing inspection training, technical assistance, and supplies to promote a strong environmental health program.

Human Services and Grants

Our team of Human Services providers are grouped into two major service areas: grants for health and wellness and social services coordination.

- **Grants for Health and Wellness**

The Town of Wakefield and Wake-Up Coalition completed its tenth and final year with the Drug-Free Communities (DFC) funding (\$125,000 per for 10 years, from October 2013 to September 2023). The coalition continues to operate with active participation from key sectors throughout the community including police, schools, business owners, parents, health care professionals, media, faith community, concerned residents, and youth. Wake-Up collaborates across the region as part of the Mystic Valley Public Health Coalition implementing regional strategies at the local level.

Melrose, Wakefield, and Stoneham HHS are collaborating on the STOP School Violence Grant, hosted by the City of Melrose (\$1,000,000 for 3 years). Partnering with all three school districts, the grant provides funding for one full-time Adjustment Counselor at WMHS for three years, professional development for WPS staff, and responsive classroom training for elementary classroom teachers and paraprofessionals. We have helped implement violence prevention activities for middle and high school students, including the expansion of

Peer-to-Peer Violence Prevention managed by the Wakefield HHS and Wakefield Alliance Against Violence.

Melrose and Wakefield HHS collaborated on the fourth year of the MelroseWakefield Tufts Healthcare grant (\$13,000). The goals that we have worked towards include supporting new immigrant residents by connecting them to local, inclusive services that directly impact social determinants of health, including but not limited to housing, education, food, clothing, legal services, employment, and primary & behavioral health needs. Improve community connections for English Learning new residents. We provide training and networking luncheons for social service providers.

Wakefield participates in the Mystic Valley Public Health Coalition, including Malden, Medford, Melrose, Reading, Stoneham & Winchester. The Regional Substance Use Prevention Grant provides \$200,000 to help fund initiatives such as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey and other regional prevention strategies.

We continue to apply for grants that support community health and wellness. We prioritize opportunities to collaborate with other Town departments and community partners.

- **Social Services Coordination**

Our Social Services Manager has been able to serve over 150 households. We continue to partner with the Wakefield Food Pantry to reach those in the community in need. Our goal is to provide as many access points as possible for individuals and families in need to be able to access crucial social services, including but not limited to employment services, food security, immigration support, winter clothing, transportation, heating assistance, MassHealth, Medicare, senior services, behavioral health services, and rental assistance. Our Social Services Manager has also completed the training required to become a MassHealth navigator, able to better serve our residents looking to sign up for or access MassHealth. Our Social Service Coordinator successfully worked with Wakefield Gas and Light to screen and process payments for residents, providing heating assistance for the second year in a row.

Tobacco Control

The Regional Tobacco Prevention Program is in year four of a ten-year DPH-funded grant. The grant supports a full-time Program Coordinator who is responsible for tobacco prevention in Wakefield, Malden, Medford, Melrose, Stoneham, Reading, and Winchester. Activities conducted in Wakefield this past fiscal year include:

- **Retailer Education**

In conjunction with the Massachusetts Tobacco Control Program (MTCP), our program coordinator worked closely with all tobacco retailers to understand State regulations and expectations.

- **Enforcement**

- Retail store inspections were completed in 100% of all retail establishments that sell tobacco/nicotine products (a total of 23 stores). Violations included minor ones which resulted in educational warnings as well as more serious violations such as hidden stock of banned products.

- Two compliance checks were completed in all 23 stores. All violations resulted in fines and additional surveillance.
- Pricing Surveys were completed in 100% of the stores. One establishment was selling cigarettes significantly below state minimum prices. Reports of egregious differences were made to DOR (Department of Revenue).

- Community Education and Awareness:

The program coordinator was able to interact with and present to individuals and groups. Numerous updates were provided to the Board of Health and Wake-Up Coalition as well as to other regional Boards and Substance Use Prevention coalitions.

- Policy:

The focus of this year was on updating local regulations to close the gap in tobacco license transfer between businesses and the implementation of Nicotine-Free Generation, a progressive policy focused on youth prevention that utilizes a birth date restriction to slowly phase out the population eligible to purchase nicotine products over time. The tobacco license loophole was presented to the Board of Health which voted in favor of closing. The Nicotine-Free Generation policy was considered by the Board of Health at a public hearing and is awaiting the decision by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruling on the Town of Brookline lawsuit.

- Other activities:

The Program Coordinator is an active participant in both the MA CALS (Massachusetts Collaboration for Action and Leadership) and MVPHC Shared Services grant-funded program; mentors one new Tobacco Control Coordinator in a neighboring community; volunteered for several public health-related activities such as Vaccination Clinics; and updated various community groups on the new state tobacco law as well as enforcement results and new product trends.

Anthony Chui serves as Health Director.